

Wrestling Perspective

• Analysis and Commentary From The McLaughlin Group of Professional Wrestling •

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Do The Job or Find Another One

"You win some and you lose some," the old saying goes. Every athlete loses occasionally, even boxer Mike Tyson and the Super Bowl Champion San Francisco 49ers, and no one writes them off. They just had a bad day most say, and their fans rarely desert them. In fact with the exception of the 1972 Miami Dolphins and Rocky Marciano, few champions ever went undefeated. Yet, there are some professional wrestlers today that refuse to be the victim of a pinfall for fear that they will lose their credibility.

There is a major conflict between management and the wrestlers when it comes to doing the job. There are two different interests that need to be served. At times, it seems that these interests appear to be mutually exclusive. A wrestler's interest is to be as successful in the organization as possible. To most wrestlers, this means getting a big push and suffering as few defeats as possible. A promoter's interest is to have the company make as much money as possible as a result of various feuds and main events that are put together. Thus, everyday, a promoter is telling an aspiring star to lose.

A wrestler has the right to be concerned about the future of his career after doing a job in front of a national audience. Who is to say that after doing one job, the booker isn't going to decide to have them do more? Who is to say it isn't the beginning of a burial like the ones perpetrated on Mike Rotunda and Eddie Gilbert? It is a professional concern; one that is justified. How many of us would be willing to put our credibility on the line for the good of the company? How many of us would be willing to put our future income potential on the line for the good of the company? How many of us have enough faith in our employers that we actually believe they will reward us properly for our loyalty?

When you look at the champions in both the NWA and the WWF, all of them have lost in front of a national audience during since the start of 1989. Although the Ultimate Warrior and Lex Luger have lost on screw-job finishes, Ric Flair, Curt Hennig, Demolition, Doom, and the Midnight Express have been pinned clean in the middle the ring and no one considers them losers. In fact, all of them are credible champions. All of these men were rewarded for their loyalty and for acting in the best interest of the company. But, for some reason, most likely named Ricky Steamboat, wrestlers seem to think of them as exceptions, rather than the rule.

The problem is that not everybody is rewarded for their loyalty. Further, some who act in their own self-interest at the expense of the promotion somehow end up being pushed to the top of the promotion, at the expense of other wrestlers, when they themselves refused to put wrestlers over at their own expense. Thus, we have the current situation in the NWA. The lack of consistency in the NWA is enough for every wrestler to question the real intentions of the company and act solely for self-preservation. Ricky Steamboat put over Lex Luger and now works sporadically for independents. Sting refused to do the job for Terry Funk while Funk did dozens of jobs for Flair. Now Sting is being groomed as the next World Champion and Funk is no longer with the company. Shane Douglas wouldn't do the job and was fired. Joel Deaton wouldn't do the job and was fired. The Great Muta did the job and left because there were no concrete plans for his future. The

Junkyard Dog refused to do the job, was fired, then rehired and pushed immediately into World Title matches. Bob Orton wouldn't do the job and was fired, but there is talk of bringing him back as well. Ric Flair did the job for Steamboat and Sting and is still the star of the promotion, but Flair also refused to a title switch. If you're confused about the logic that transcends this situation, imagine how the wrestlers feel. This situation, however, does not excuse Sting, Ric Flair, The Junkyard Dog or anyone else in the promotion for refusing to do the job when it is in the best interest of the company. Nobody in the NWA is drawing well enough that he can have a prima donna attitude that puts his interests above that of the promotion.

One part of the problem seems to stem from a wrestler who refused to do the job for the better part of the 80s. Prior to Wrestlemania VI, Hulk Hogan's last clean job in the U.S. was against Tony Atlas in 1981. For over eight years every opponent who went against him could not pin him. When he became the WWF World Champion, he became an unbeatable superstar. Men with far more talent like Ted DiBiase, Randy Savage and Paul Orndorff never knocked the man off and the Hogan legend grew. Hogan refused to put other wrestlers over and many contenders found their careers floundering after failing to beat him. Vince McMahon justified this by the tremendous business Hogan brought in. Since Hogan was the top draw in the United States, a number of wrestlers felt the only way to be a top draw was to have a Hogan type record, refuse to do the job and dominate a promotion. Hence, they became egomaniacs refusing to do jobs without the gate receipts to back up their inflated sense of self worth.

What promoters and wrestlers fail to realize is that parity creates interest in matches not one dominant player. Hogan was the exception, not the rule. Take a look at the Road Warriors, the Von Erichs or Jerry Lawler. Here are wrestlers who refused to put people over and hurt the promotion they worked for in the process. Not only did they hurt the promotion, they hurt themselves. None of them have any drawing power. Had they put people over and occasionally even been made an underdog, they might have remained a top draw for a longer period of time. Long-term parity is what makes a promotion interesting. It creates some suspense and mystery as one is never sure who is going to win.

Instead, a pattern has emerged that was taken from the Bob Backlund championship era. There is a superstar and a bunch of guys who try to dethrone him. As a potential contender enters, he almost never loses until he meets the champion. At this point he either wins the belt or, in most cases loses to the champion. Then a pattern emerges: the person who has just lost to the lead star begins to lose matches left and right. Take a look at Ted DiBiase after his run with Randy Savage. Take a look at the Freebirds after their loss to the Steiners. Few people believe they will win anymore and they have become stepping stones for other wrestlers. Their matches have become predictable and, in some instances, boring.

The big question mark for any wrestler is how many loses are too many. There is no concrete answer to this question. Some wrestlers can lose night after night, get a little push and be over as champions or a top star. The Midnight Express immediately come to mind. Others seem to lose steam after one major loss. But, this situation can be alleviated to some degree if the booker and the promoter have long-term plans for the wrestlers and the promotion. A wrestler should be assured that he will be compensated for putting another over. Or, if he is being phased down, he should be told so flat out so he does not live with false expectations. We have seen that most any wrestler can be brought back to the top if promoted properly. The promoters need to sit down and work out long-term ideas and agreements. If the wrestlers don't accept this, they should be buried on television and then fired.

The wrestler who refuses to do the job hurts the promotion and deserves to be fired. Conversely, the promoter who lies about a push, a title, plays games with contracts and, in general, treats his wrestlers with little respect doesn't deserve loyal employees willing to take a risk for the betterment of the company. Unfortunately, few companies are honest

enough with their employees that they deserve the type of loyalty Steamboat gave the NWA. Few wrestlers, however, are so important that they can justifiably hurt the company for their own personal gain. There is a major conflict that presents no easy solution because of the parties involved. Until a solution is found, we are going to continue to see the conflict between wrestlers and promoters continue with the promotions and the fans doing the job.

Sidelines

Thanks To - First off, a note of thanks to Steve Beverly of *Matwatch*, Wade Keller of *Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly*, and Jim Dough & Joe DiCarlo of *Wrestling Style* for their very complimentary plugs. Also thanks to Mike Gunderloy for his review in *Factsheet Five*. Finally, thanks to Greg Oliver for his recent plug in *Canadian Wrestling Report*. We appreciate the help and the kind comments.

The Pro Wrestling Torch is one of the best newsletters available today. It has just started a weekly schedule at a cost of \$5.00 for every four issues. Each issue contains news, commentary, humor, a color photo and is well worth the price. Also, the Pro Wrestling Torch Annual III is available for \$10.00 and will contain a number of interesting and entertaining features including one by Paul. To order Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly and the Annual III, send your money to: Wade Keller, PO Box 201844, Minneapolis, MN 55420.

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Video Tape Review

By - Paul J. MacArthur

The Best of Starrcade

This is the tape that was being pushed really hard right before Starrcade '88. The Best of Starrcade contains 10 complete matches from Starrcades '83 - '87. Magnum T.A. hosts this video that contains some excellent matches from the first five Starrcades. From Starrcade '83 we are treated to the classic Roddy Piper/Greg Valentine dog collar match. The Briscos defend the World Tag Team Championships against Ricky Steamboat and Jay Youngblood and Ric Flair wins his second World Championship from Harley Race. These are classic matches that should be in any wrestling fans' tape collection. The matches from Starrcade '84 include a fantastic Ricky Steamboat/Tully Blanchard challenge and the classic million dollar battle between Dusty Rhodes and Flair. The reason to get this tape is for the best matches from Starrcades '83, '84 and '85 as Starrcades '86 and '87 are available in

their entirety from Turner Home Entertainment. The picture quality is good throughout, while the production has it's ups and downs as Jim Crockett Promotions never seemed to be wizards at television production. Overall, this is a good tape, even if the price tag seems a bit high when one considers five of the matches are already available on other Turner Home Entertainment tapes. *Recommended.*

The Best of Starrcade is available for \$39.95 from Turner Home Entertainment, PO Box 44290 Department W, Pittsburgh, PA 15205 or call 1-800-257-1234.

Tommy Young Down For The Count But Not Forgotten

By - David Skolnick

A man synonymous with professional wrestling has been forced to retire from the sport recently. Although this man has been instrumental in more title changes than Harley Race and Lou Albano, his exit from wrestling has gone virtually unnoticed. There was no gold watch ceremony for veteran referee Tommy Young, but there should have been. After all, Tommy has done and seen it all in his many years as an NWA referee. Main events, hot angles, vicious feuds - Tommy's been down that road as many times as Ric Flair and Dusty Rhodes.

A career-ending back injury forced Tommy to step down from his position, but there will always be fond memories of the man. His work with Flair is legendary. You've seen it dozens of times: Flair pushes Tommy after what the champ perceives to be a slow count or a bad call. Then the much smaller referee drops the champ to the mat with a shove. His one, two, not quite three count was the best in the business. The match would look like it was history but somehow the prone wrestler would kick out and Tommy would miss hitting the mat for the third time by inches. To show us how close he was to counting a pinfall, Tommy would jerk his elbow, wave his hands and head and measure how close he was to a three count with his hands only an inch or two apart.

My fondest memory of Tommy was during the legendary \$50,000 challenge for the World Television title between Rhodes and Tully Blanchard during the Summer of 1987. Rhodes pinned Blanchard, but Tully's foot ended on the ropes after the count. Tommy noticed the foot and ordered the match to resume. However, J.J. Dillon left the arena with the bag of money and Rhodes chased him; getting counted out. Yet another screw job finish, but this one had a twist. During an interview with Tony Schiavone after the match, Tommy was shown the videotape of the match. Stunned by his mistake, he considered reversing his decision but instead decided to uphold Blanchard's victory. The faces and reactions Tommy made during the interview would have made Jerry Lawler proud. It's not often a referee can do a good interview, but Tommy pulled it off brilliantly and kept that feud going for months to come.

The one time I met Tommy, he was not refereeing, but was sitting in the stands watching the matches. When the card was over, Paul and I went over to him to pay our respects. Ever the gentleman, Tommy thanked us for the kind words and shook our hands. It is always a pleasure to meet someone who is gracious when a fan offers a compliment. The one trouble Tommy had during his career was that he could not take too many bumps without seriously injuring himself. He was not a big man, but often put his body on the line. In fact, it was a bump during a Tommy Rich/Mike Rotunda match that ended his career as wrestling's premier referee.

Tommy has been an NWA fixture for so many years that it is going to be strange not seeing him and his striped shirt at the matches. Just last year, he raised Ricky Steamboat's hand in victory and awarded him the World Title in a memorable scene. A few months later, he

climbed the Thunderdome cage at Halloween Havoc to put out a fire with his bare hands. He was always right in the middle of the action. Hopefully, the NWA will reward Tommy's years of loyalty and give him a well-deserved front office position. Whatever you end up doing Tommy, you'll always be remembered by your fans as the best ever.

The Success of Portland Wrestling

By - Jeff Rubin

With this issue, Wrestling Perspective welcomes Jeff Rubin as a regular/semi-regular featured columnist. Jeff has been a wrestling fan for 30 years. He grew up with the WWWF on the East Coast (New York, Washington, DC, Boston and Portland, ME). He has a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree from the University of Southern ME. Jeff's favorite wrestlers include Ric Flair, Tenryu, Terry Funk and Jerry Lawler. It is with great pleasure that we welcome Jeff to the Wrestling Perspective family and we hope you find his work enjoyable.

Having lived in Oregon since 1976, I've had the opportunity to follow Don Owen's promotion for the past 14 years. While the Pacific Northwest promotion has had its ups and downs and at times seemed close to folding, it has always bounced back. Since the advent of the sheets and tape trading, it has been, at times, the hottest independent in the nation. Many of today's top stars have honed their skills in the Northwest rings: Roddy Piper, Jesse Ventura and Curt Hennig to name just a few. The actual work leaves a lot to be desired; sometimes it is downright awful, but this seems to be of little importance. At times there have been good to very good matches, but they are few and far between. There have also been some great interviews and interview brawls such as the classic Piper/John Nord fire extinguisher fight. So what makes this group successful? The simplistic answer is the fans keep spending their money at the Portland Sports Arena, and the spot shows that run almost every night at towns all around the state. However, the more complex answer requires further analysis.

A fan commented on the Connie Chung piece last month that "wrestling is like a soap opera without sex." I pretty much agree with that statement. The soap opera concept is an important one. In Portland there are very few inbetweeners. Wrestlers are either heels or faces, evil or good. Sometimes the good are tempted as Eve was in The Garden of Eden, and they may turn or reject the temptation. The point is the fan almost always knows who is who until the suspense builds and the turn is completed or turned down to the delight of the fans.

What dictates the success or failure of a promotion, is whether or not the fans can follow the story lines. For the most part, Len Denton has done a very good job in this area. Most story lines are played out over a long period of time, such as the current Billy Jack/Rip Oliver battle. There is almost never a decisive ending to a match. Instead, the story builds in the same fashion as the story on any of the daytime soaps. While "smart" fans may say this upsets them, they do not comprise anywhere near the majority of the ticket buying public which comes back week after week hoping to see the heel killed. It almost never happens. Instead, there is a run in-screw job finish and the story is kept going in the Crow's Nest (Sports Arena interview area) where most of the best action takes place. Interviews, while not polished, are good enough to draw enough heat to keep the fans excited and interested enough to come back next week or see the spot show when it comes to their town.

To his credit, Denton (with a lot of help from Roddy Piper behind the scenes) has been able to create characters that fans want to follow. Let's take on in particular: a creation of

Roddy Piper called Bettleguese (from the Michael Keaton movie of the same name). Art Barr is a poor to fair professional wrestler, who is the son of former wrestler/referee Sandy Barr and younger brother of Jimmy Jack Funk. He weighs about 185 lbs. soaking wet and is rail thin. As Art Barr he couldn't draw flies, but as Bettleguese, he has a following you can't believe; almost all 16 years old or younger. They come to the arena with their faces painted like Barr and march around the ring to the Banana Boat Song. When you see it on TV it looks spontaneous, but at the arena they call all the kids up to the entry area and set it all up. The following he has is incredible, especially in the face of the fact that, although he does work hard, he's not a good wrestler. What he does do is draw kids, their parents and their parents money.

Denton, as booker, has had much success and some failure, and is not afraid to try new angles or gimmicks. His angles are designed to get people over and generate heat. Some of his angles have been pretty tasteless, particularly the ones involving Haynes' crippled father and Oliver's crippled brother, but they have drawn a lot of heat. You cannot believe the crowd intensity at the Arena. The matches tell a story, one that the fans can follow. While Denton has been involved in many of the biggest angles and matches, his ego isn't so large that he can't take a back seat for the sake of the promotion. Often, he will use himself to set up the story and then bow out when the true story line is established, as in the recent Oliver/Haynes feud. He makes the best use of the talent he has, turning Oliver into an extremely popular babyface (after years as a heel) and Haynes (who was the second most over face next to Piper) into one hell of a monster heel. His turning of Scott Levy into a babyface has been nothing short of masterful. Of course, Levy is a tremendous performer, and his role in the change cannot be discounted; he's definitely a star of the future. However, most of the credit has to be given to Denton. He's done an overall great job turning this promotion around and while there was a lull a few months ago, the situation is red hot right now.

Finally, there is the issue of TV. The Portland show is not anything to write home about; the production values are atrocious, they have two cameras both placed in the Crow's Nest and when they play entrance music, Don Koss holds the microphone up to a rather small cassette player. Not the WWF you say? Yes, it's far from Vince's slick production, but the show works. It has a huge following and is highly rated. Again, it is the overall booking combined with Koss' ability to act surprised. He doesn't overact in the tradition of Marc Lowrance, in fact his strong point is that he does convey a sense of reality to the fantasy proceedings. The show accomplishes two goals: 1) It promotes the continuing story lines thereby getting people at home to attend the show live next week and 2) It promotes the spot shows in all the towns the group will be in the following week. That's all it's designed to do and it does it well. If these factors are maintained, Portland Wrestling will continue to be successful. If not, the promotion will flounder and perhaps go the way of other independents that have died off in recent months.

Wabbit Season, Duck Season... Baseball Season

By - Paul J. MacArthur

It's becoming so that I dread baseball season. Don't get me wrong, I love the sport. Few things in life are prettier than a Nolan Ryan curveball. Even fewer are more awesome than his fastball. But, baseball season has a drawback that has begun to outweigh its fine points. When baseball season arrives, viewers have to scramble each week in a search to find NWA/WCW wrestling on WTBS. On June 1, 1990 there was no Power Hour because the Braves had a game on the West Coast. On June 3, 1990 there was no Main Event because the Braves had a game. Only two weeks later, the Power Hour was preempted by a west cost Braves game on June 15, another Braves game that ran late canceled the June 17 Main Event. WTBS provided its wrestling fans with one program

when they are accustomed to, and faithfully watch, three wrestling programs each weekend.

In this instance, WTBS showed complete lack of regard for the wrestling audience. They did not mention the previous week that there wouldn't be a Power Hour on Friday and a Main Event on Sunday. Instead, some found out through local TV listings while others tuned in to see the Braves continue their quest for the Western Division basement. For those who tuned in, there was no mention that the Power Hour was being preempted. Thus, some may have tried to sit through the Braves, hoping the game would end soon and the Power Hour had been delayed. Those that did were more than disappointed as WTBS chose not to run a Power Hour that week. On Sunday, WTBS again decided to preempt NWA wrestling for the Braves and treated the audience with the same lack of consideration they showed the previous Friday.

The message from WTBS is crystal clear: the wrestling audience receives the least amount of consideration from the WTBS programming department. Almost every week during baseball season an NWA program is either late, preempted or joined in progress (JIP) as a direct result of Atlanta Braves baseball. One shouldn't have much of a problem with NWA programs starting late but, picture a scenario where the NWA runs a Clash and, for some reason, there is only 10 minutes of airtime left for a main event that was scheduled to be 30 minutes long and include a five minute post match wrap up. What do you think the chances are of WTBS allowing the Clash to run overtime? As Freddie Blassie used to say, "You've got two chances: slim and none."

Perhaps the most frustrating thing of all is the infamous JIP. This is the programmers way of saying that your program isn't important enough to be watched in its entirety. This has happened to the NWA Main Event and World Championship Wrestling so often during the past year that it's disgraceful. When CBS and NBC have football games that run late on Sundays, they make sure they show the Sunday night lineup in its entirety, regardless of how late they are running. This is a commitment to their viewers. WTBS could show the same type of commitment to wrestling fans and do a JIP to one of their low rated overnight programs. Fewer viewers would be affected and WTBS would still be able to run programs on time by 6:00 AM the next morning. Instead, they are so concerned about making sure the 7:05 or 8:05 movie starts on time, that they ignore the interests of over two million regular viewers. This is hardly the way to run a successful broadcast operation, let alone promote a product they supposedly have an interest in being successful.

In a March issue of *Electronic Media*, William Grumbles, executive vice president of Turner Network Cable Sales discussed Turner's NFL contract moving from WTBS to TNT. There were a number of reasons behind this switch, but one of the most interesting ones was "TBS SuperStation also decided not to preempt its Sunday evening showings of 'National Geographic Specials' with NFL games because that show has a loyal audience." Do we not deserve the same respect as the regular viewers of the National Geographic Specials? Particularly since the ratings for the NWA programs are consistently higher than those of the National Geographic Explorer series. WTBS has sent us a disturbing message: we are not as valuable to them as the viewers of their other programs. This is an insult. Even more so when one considers the consistent ratings we provide and the revenue stream WTBS picks up from our loyal viewing.

There is a simple solution to this problem. It involves showing a little courtesy and respect for the millions of loyal NWA viewers. When a baseball or football game causes a wrestling show to be delayed, WTBS should run a crawl on the bottom of the screen starting five minutes before the scheduled time of the show, stating the program will be shown in its entirety after the conclusion of the game. This crawl should be run once every two minutes until WCW, the Power Hour or Main Event starts as viewers will tune in at different times to see if the wrestling program is going to air. This also means that crawls be run across the wrestling program when the Friday Night Movie is delayed for example. WTBS should do this until they do a JIP to the lowest rated program during the overnight

period. This shows courtesy to the wrestling fans, the movie fans and whoever else might find their program delayed because of a baseball or football game.

WTBS has been reluctant to show wrestling fans any kind of respect when it comes to providing the NWA consistently to its loyal fans. What makes this incomprehensible is that the NWA is a subsidiary of TBS. Each program, in theory, should help encourage viewers to watch the Clash Specials, buy the PPVs and attend the house shows. When the fans do this, the NWA benefits and, resultantly, TBS benefits. Why is TBS unable to see this?

Letters To The Editors

Know why you didn't get any response to your "Save The Independents" idea? Because it's hopeless. Wrestling people refuse to change their set ideas and ways. If a person can get a number of hours of wrestling on TV and, if he/she is lucky, can make friends and/or trading partners, anyone can get tapes from all over the world, often with good wrestling while the independents are bound and determined to present trash. I mean, would you really go to a noisy, smoky arena, pay out a certain amount of money, sit in a crowd and watch Baron Von Raschke vs. Chris Markoff? I know I wouldn't. I would rather stay home, avoid the smoke and hassles, fast forward through the nonsense and watch good wrestling. Yes, it's a different atmosphere and I sort of hate to see it disappear. But, for me, if my local independent does start up, I may go to a couple. On the other hand, one card would cost me about \$35 counting gas and such. For that, I can get two tapes of Japanese wrestling. Three guesses which I am apt to choose.

Rodney Leighton
Pugwash, Canada

End Notes

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed: we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." - *Martin Luther King Jr., Washington, August, 27 1963* -

"...And this Rocky King. This human licorice stick, that comes out here mentioning my name on national television: I'm your better. Where I come from we don't associate with your kind, and we certainly don't talk to you." - *Arn Anderson, World Championship Wrestling, June 9, 1990* -

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